

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

SECDEF WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONO

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, US, VS, VN, CB, CH

SUBJECT: CHANGES IN THAI FOREIGN POLICY AND THEIR EFFECT
ON THE U.S.

REF: BANGKOK 5736

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1. THE DETERIORATING MILITARY SITUATIONS IN CAMBODIA AND SOUTH

VIETNAM HAVE CAUSED OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS ACCELERATION OF THREE SHIFTS IN RTG FOREIGN POLICY ALREADY UNDER WAY. THEY ARE INCREASED PUBLIC NEUTRALITY REGARDING CAMBODIA, A DICHOTOMY ABOUT THE UTILITY OF THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND, AND A VIEW THAT CONTACTS WITH THE DRV ARE INCREASINGLY NECESSARY. THE RTG IS IN THE MIDST OF RETHINKING AND REVALUATING ITS FOREIGN POLICY STANCE. IT HAS YET TO ARRIVE AT ANY CONCLUSIONS, BUT THE TREND IS ALONG TWO DIVERSE TRACKS.

2. QUICK ACCOMMODATION: THOSE THAI WHO HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY REFERRING TO THEIR HISTORY BOOKS RECALL THAT THEY HAVE BEEN FORCED TO DEAL WITH HOSTILE REGIMES TO THE EAST ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS OVER THE LAST 700 YEARS. THEY HAVE COPEd WITH THIS SITUATION IN THE PAST AND EXPECT TO DO SO IN THE FUTURE. SOME OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ARE THE PRINCIPAL PROPONENTS OF THE LINE THAT THAILAND MUST WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT WITH COMMUNIST INDOCHINA THAT WOULD PERMIT PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE. WITHOUT SURRENDERING TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, THEY BELIEVE THAT THE ONLY VIABLE THAI OPTION IS TO WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT WITH HANOI IN WHICH THE TWO SIDES COULD LIVE IN PEACE. THIS ACCOMMODATION WOULD BEGIN QUICKLY. MANY THAI HAVE AN ABIDING FAITH THAT IF ONLY THEY COULD TALK TO THEIR ENEMIES THERE WOULD BE NO MORE MILITANT CONTEST.

3. HEIGHTENED DEFENSE: THERE ARE SOME SENIOR GENERALS IN THE THAI DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT WHO BELIEVE THAT THAILAND SHOULD STRENGTHEN ITSELF ENOUGH MILITARILY TO WITHSTAND PRESSURES FROM HANOI AND PEKING WITHOUT GIVING THEM MAJOR CONCESSIONS. THIS STANCE PRESUPPOSES THE BEEFING UP OF THAI MILITARY FORCES AND A SLOWDOWN IN THE DIPLOMATIC APPROACH TO HANOI AND PEKING. THAI FORCES WOULD NEED SUFFICIENT WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT TO CONVINCE HANOI OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE RTG POSTURE.

4. THESE TWO TRACKS ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. ONE TRACK ADDRESSES DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES ABROAD AND THE OTHER THE SHORING UP OF DOMESTIC DEFENSES. THE THAI CAN PURSUE ACCOMMODATION AND STRENGTHEN THEIR FORCES SIMULTANESOUSLY.

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5. ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S.: THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO FAVOR ACCOMMODATION LOOK ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND AS A HINDRANCE. HANOI, IN FREQUENT PROPAGANDA BLASTS, HAS CITED ITS DESIRE TO HAVE THESE FORCES DEPART. THE ARGUMENTS OF THE ACCOMMODATERS GAIN ADDED CREDENCE FROM OUR LACK OF MILITARY ACTION IN THE FACE OF THE UNFOLDING DISASTER IN INDOCHINA. ARDENT NATIONALISTS ALSO LOOK ON FOREIGN MILITARY

PRESENCE AS A POLITICAL LIABILITY, PARTICULARLY UNDER A POPULARLY-ELECTED REGIME THAT IS SUBJECTED TO CONSTANT QUERY AND VERBAL ATTACK. SOME WHO FAVOR ACCOMMODATION SEE SOME BENEFIT IN HOLDING ON TO A MODEST NUMBER OF U.S. MILITARY FORCES IN THAILAND AS A BARGAINING CHIP TO TRADE WITH HANOI FOR POLITICAL CONCESSIONS.

6. THOSE WHO FAVOR A MORE MILITANT STAND TOWARD HANOI AND PEKING SEE SEVERAL ADVANTAGES IN A CONTINUED U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE. IT COULD SIGNAL TO THAILAND'S ASIAN NEIGHBORS THAT AN OVERT ATTACK ON THAILAND MIGHT INVOLVE MORE THAN A THAI RESPONSE. OUR MILITARY FORCES WOULD THUS SERVE A HOSTAGE AND TRIPWIRE ROLE. THEIR PRESENCE WOULD ALSO BE CONDUCIVE TO A CONTINUING MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR THAILAND THAT THE THAI WOULD FIND ESSENTIAL TO THE STRENGTHENING OF THEIR ARMED FORCES.

7. CONCLUSIONS: WE WOULD EXPECT THE THAI TO PROCEED CAUTIOUSLY IN REFORMULATING THEIR FOREIGN POLICY STANCE. THEY ARE LIKELY TO KEEP ALL OPTIONS OPEN, INCLUDING THAT OF A CLOSE BUT NOT EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. THEY WILL BE WATCHING THE OUTCOME IN INDOCHINA, AS WELL AS HOW WE, CHINA, NORTH VIETNAM, AND THE USSR REACT. ALTHOUGH THE TWO TRACKS OF THEIR FOREIGN POLICY PLANNING SEEM TO VEER IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS, THERE IS NO REASON WHY THE THAI CANNOT PURSUE ACCOMMODATION AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THEIR DEFENSE POSTURE SIMULTANEOUSLY.

8. THE THAI MAY THUS BE UNWILLING TO TOLERATE A CONTINUING U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE LONG RUN, BUT THEY MIGHT CONSIDER REENTRY RIGHTS AS A HEDGE AGAINST DISASTER. ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT, THE SPECIAL RAPPORT THAT WE ENJOYED WITH THAILAND FROM 1950 UNTIL THE EARLY 1970'S HAS ALREADY
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COME TO AN END. THAILAND WILL CONTINUE TO WANT TO ASSOCIATE ITSELF WITH A MAJOR POWER, HOWEVER, AND IT HAS NOHPALATABLE OPTIONS OTHER THAN THE U.S. WE THUS SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO WORK REASONABLY CLOSELY WITH THE THAI FOR SEVERAL YEARS IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SUCH A RELATIONSHIP WOULD BE THAILAND'S PREFERENCE. ITS IMMEDIATE BORDER SECURITY SITUATION, GIVEN A COMMUNIST-DOMINATED INDOCHINA, WILL REQUIRE A LESS PUBLICLY HOSPITABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD US AND WILL RULE OUT A RIVIVAL OF THE FREE-WHEELING U.S. ROLE IN THAILAND OF THE 1960S.

9. THE THAI HAVE YET TO BURN THEIR BRIDGES BUT ARE LOOKING QUITE SERIOUSLY AT THE VIABILITY OF THE THAI-U.S. RELATIONSHIP, AND AT ALTERNATIVES. IF WE ACT IMAGINATIVELY, WE STILL HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF RETAINING THE OPTIONS OF

CONTINUING TO MEET SOME OF OUR MOST IMPORTANT INTERESTS IN AND
THROUGH THAILAND.

10. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOW IN A SEPTTEL.
MASTERS

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